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CALVINISM

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BY

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CALVINISM.

GENTLEMEN,—While I am unwilling to allow the temporary connexion between us to come to an end without once more addressing you, I find it difficult to select a subject on which it may be worth your while to listen to what I have to say. You know yourselves better than I can tell you the purposes for which you are assembled in this place. Many of you will have formed honourable resolutions to acquit yourselves bravely and manfully, both in your term of preparation here, and in the life which you are about to enter—resolutions which would make exhortations of mine to you to persevere appear unmeaning and almost impertinent. You are conscious in detail of the aims which you have set before yourselves—you have, perhaps, already chosen the professions which you mean to follow, and are better aware than I can be of the subjects which you have to master if you mean to pursue them successfully. I should show myself unworthy of the honour which you conferred on me in my election as your Rector were I to waste your time with profitless generalities. I have decided, after due consideration, to speak to you of things which, though not immediately connected with the University of St. Andrew's, or any other University,

yet concern us all more nearly than any other matter in the world; and though I am not vain enough to suppose that I can throw new material light upon them, yet where there is so much division and uncertainty, the sincere convictions of any man, if openly expressed, may be of value as factors in the problem. At all events, I shall hope that the hour for which I shall ask you to attend to me will not have passed away without leaving some definite trace behind it.

I may say at once that I am about to travel over serious ground. I shall not trespass on theology, though I must go near the frontiers of it. I shall give you the conclusions which I have been led to form upon a series of spiritual phenomena which have appeared successively in different ages of the world—which have exercised the most remarkable influence on the character and history of mankind, and have left their traces nowhere more distinctly than in this Scotland where we now stand.

Every one here present must have become familiar in late years with the change of tone throughout Europe and America on the subject of Calvinism. After being accepted for two centuries in all Protestant countries as the final account of the relations between man and his Maker, it has come to be regarded by liberal thinkers as a system of belief incredible in itself, dishonouring to its object, and as intolerable as it has been itself intolerant. The Catholics whom it overthrew take courage from the philosophers, and assail it on the same ground. To represent man as sent into the world under a curse,

as incurably wicked—wicked by the constitution of his flesh, and wicked by eternal decree—as doomed, unless exempted by special grace which he cannot merit, or by any effort of his own obtain, to live in sin while he remains on earth, and to be eternally miserable when he leaves it—to represent him as born unable to keep the commandments, yet as justly liable to everlasting punishment for breaking them, is alike repugnant to reason and to conscience, and turns existence into a hideous nightmare. To deny the freedom of the will is to make morality impossible. To tell men that they cannot help themselves is to fling them into recklessness and despair. To what purpose the effort to be virtuous when it is an effort which is foredoomed to fail—when those that are saved are saved by no effort of their own, and confess themselves the worst of sinners, even when rescued from the penalties of sin; and those that are lost are lost by an everlasting sentence decreed against them before they were born? How are we to call the Ruler who laid us under this iron code by the name of Wise, or Just, or Merciful, when we ascribe principles of action to Him which in a human father we should call preposterous and monstrous?

The discussion of these strange questions has been pursued at all times with inevitable passion, and the crisis uniformly has been a drawn battle. The Arminian has entangled the Calvinist, the Calvinist has entangled the Arminian, in a labyrinth of contradictions. The advocate of free will appeals to conscience and instinct—to an *à priori* sense of

what ought in equity to be. The necessitarian falls back upon the experienced reality of facts. It is true, and no argument can gainsay it, that men are placed in the world unequally favoured, both in inward disposition and outward circumstances. Some children are born with temperaments which make a life of innocence and purity natural and easy to them; others are born with violent passions, or even with distinct tendencies to evil inherited from their ancestors, and seemingly unconquerable—some are constitutionally brave, others are constitutionally cowards —some are born in religious families, and are carefully educated and watched over; others draw their first breath in an atmosphere of crime, and cease to inhale it only when they pass into their graves. Only a fourth part of mankind are born Christians. The remainder never hear the name of Christ except as a reproach. The Chinese and the Japanese—we may almost say every weaker race with whom we have come in contact—connect it only with the forced intrusion of strangers whose behaviour among them has served ill to recommend their creed. These are facts which no casuistry can explain away. And if we believe at all that the world is governed by a conscious and intelligent Being, we must believe also, however we can reconcile it with our own ideas, that these anomalies have not arisen by accident, but have been ordered of purpose and design.

No less noticeable is it that the materialistic and the metaphysical philosophers deny as completely as Calvinism what is popularly called Free Will. Every

effect has its cause. In every action the will is determined by the motive which at the moment is operating most powerfully upon it. When we do wrong, we are led away by temptation. If we overcome our temptation, we overcome it either because we foresee inconvenient consequences, and the certainty of future pains is stronger than the present pleasure; or else because we prefer right to wrong, and our desire for good is greater than our desire for indulgence. It is impossible to conceive a man, when two courses are open to him, choosing that which he least desires. He may say that he can do what he dislikes because it is his duty. Precisely so. His desire to do his duty is a stronger motive with him than the attraction of present pleasure.

Spinoza, from entirely different premises, came to the same conclusion as Mr. Mill or Mr. Buckle, and can find no better account of the situation of man than in the illustration of St. Paul, 'Hath not the potter power over the clay, to make one vessel to honour and another to dishonour?'

If Arminianism most commends itself to our feelings, Calvinism is nearer to the facts, however harsh and forbidding those facts may seem.

I have no intention, however, of entangling myself or you in these controversies. As little shall I consider whether men have done wisely in attempting a doctrinal solution of problems the conditions of which are so imperfectly known. The moral system of the universe is like a document written in alternate ciphers, which change from line to line. We read a

sentence, but at the next our key fails us ; we see that there is something written there, but if we guess at it we are guessing in the dark. It seems more faithful, more becoming, in beings such as we are, to rest in the conviction of our own inadequacy, and confine ourselves to those moral rules for our lives and actions on which, so far as they concern ourselves, we are left in no uncertainty at all.

At present, at any rate, we are concerned with an aspect of the matter entirely different. I am going to ask you to consider how it came to pass that if Calvinism is indeed the hard and unreasonable creed which modern enlightenment declares it to be, it has possessed such singular attractions in past times for some of the greatest men that ever lived. And how —being, as we are told, fatal to morality, because it denies free will—the first symptom of its operation, wherever it established itself, was to obliterate the distinction between sins and crimes, and to make the moral law the rule of life for States as well as persons. I shall ask you, again, why, if it be a creed of intellectual servitude, it was able to inspire and sustain the bravest efforts ever made by man to break the yoke of unjust authority. When all else has failed—when patriotism has covered its face and human courage has broken down—when intellect has yielded, as Gibbon says, 'with a smile or a sigh,' content to philosophise in the closet, and abroad worship with the vulgar—when emotion and sentiment and tender imaginative piety have become the handmaids of superstition, and have dreamt themselves into forget-

fulness that there is any difference between lies and truth—the slavish form of belief called Calvinism, in one or other of its many forms, has borne ever an inflexible front to illusion and mendacity, and has preferred rather to be ground to powder like flint than to bend before violence or melt under enervating temptation.

It is enough to mention the name of William the Silent, of Luther—for on the points of which I am speaking Luther was one with Calvin—of your own Knox and Andrew Melville and the Regent Murray, of Coligny, of our English Cromwell, of Milton, of John Bunyan. These were men possessed of all the qualities which give nobility and grandeur to human nature—men whose life was as upright as their intellect was commanding and their public aims untainted with selfishness; unalterably just where duty required them to be stern, but with the tenderness of a woman in their hearts; frank, true, cheerful, humorous, as unlike sour fanatics as it is possible to imagine anyone, and able in some way to sound the keynote to which every brave and faithful heart in Europe instinctively vibrated.

This is the problem. Grapes do not grow on bramble-bushes. Illustrious natures do not form themselves upon narrow and cruel theories. Spiritual life is full of apparent paradoxes. When St. Patrick preached the Gospel on Tarah hill to Leoghaire, the Irish king, the Druids and the wise men of Ireland shook their heads. 'Why,' asked the king, 'does what the cleric preaches seem so dangerous to you?'

'Because,' was the remarkable answer, 'because he preaches repentance, and the law of repentance is such that a man shall say, "I may commit a thousand crimes, and if I repent I shall be forgiven, and it will be no worse with me: therefore I will continue to sin."' The Druids argued logically, but they drew a false inference notwithstanding. The practical effect of a belief is the real test of its soundness. Where we find a heroic life appearing as the uniform fruit of a particular mode of opinion, it is childish to argue in the face of fact that the result ought to have been different.

The question which I have proposed, however, admits of a reasonable answer. I must ask you only to accompany me on a somewhat wide circuit in search of it.

There seems, in the first place, to lie in all men, in proportion to the strength of their understanding, a conviction that there is in all human things a real order and purpose, notwithstanding the chaos in which at times they seem to be involved. Suffering scattered blindly without remedial purpose or retributive propriety—good and evil distributed with the most absolute disregard of moral merit or demerit—enormous crimes perpetrated with impunity, or vengeance when it comes falling not on the guilty, but the innocent—

> Desert a beggar born,
> And needy nothing trimmed in jollity—

these phenomena present, generation after generation, the same perplexing and even maddening features;

and without an illogical but none the less a positive certainty that things are not as they seem—that, in spite of appearance, there is justice at the heart of them, and that, in the working out of the vast drama, justice will assert somehow and somewhere its sovereign right and power, the better sort of persons would find existence altogether unendurable. This is what the Greeks meant by the Ἀνάγκη or destiny, which at the bottom is no other than moral Providence. Prometheus chained on the rock is the counterpart of Job on his dunghill. Torn with unrelaxing agony, the vulture with beak and talons rending at his heart, the Titan still defies the tyrant at whose command he suffers, and, strong in conscious innocence, appeals to the eternal Μοῖρα which will do him right in the end. The Olympian gods were cruel, jealous, capricious, malignant; but beyond and above the Olympian gods lay the silent, brooding, everlasting fate of which victim and tyrant were alike the instruments, and which at last, far off, after ages of misery it might be, but still before all was over, would vindicate the sovereignty of justice. Full as it may be of contradictions and perplexities, this obscure belief lies at the very core of our spiritual nature, and it is called fate or it is called predestination according as it is regarded pantheistically as a necessary condition of the universe or as the decree of a self-conscious being.

Intimately connected with this belief, and perhaps the fact of which it is the inadequate expression, is the existence in nature of omnipresent organic laws, penetrating the material world, penetrating the moral

world of human life and society, which insist on being obeyed in all that we do and handle—which we cannot alter, cannot modify—which will go with us, and assist and befriend us, if we recognise and comply with them—which inexorably make themselves felt in failure and disaster if we neglect or attempt to thwart them. Search where we will among created things, far as the microscope will allow the eye to pierce, we find organisation everywhere. Large forms resolve themselves into parts, but these parts are but organised out of other parts, down so far as we can see into infinity. When the plant meets with the conditions which agree with it, it thrives; under unhealthy conditions it is poisoned and disintegrates. It is the same precisely with each one of ourselves, whether as individuals or as aggregated into associations, into families, into nations, into institutions. The remotest fibre of human action, from the policy of empires to the most insignificant trifle over which we waste an idle hour or moment, either moves in harmony with the true law of our being, or is else at discord with it. A king or a parliament enacts a law, and we imagine we are creating some new regulation, to encounter unprecedented circumstances. The law itself which applied to these circumstances was enacted from eternity. It has its existence independent of us, and will enforce itself either to reward or punish, as the attitude which we assume towards it is wise or unwise. Our human laws are but the copies, more or less imperfect, of the eternal laws so far as we can read them, and either succeed and

promote our welfare, or fail and bring confusion and disaster, according as the legislator's insight has detected the true principle, or has been distorted by ignorance or selfishness.

And these laws are absolute, inflexible, irreversible, the steady friends of the wise and good, the eternal enemies of the blockhead and the knave. No Pope can dispense with a statute enrolled in the Chancery of Heaven, or popular vote repeal it. The discipline is a stern one, and many a wild endeavour men have made to obtain less hard conditions, or imagine them other than they are. They have conceived the rule of the Almighty to be like the rule of one of themselves. They have fancied that they could bribe or appease Him—tempt Him by penance or pious offering to suspend or turn aside his displeasure. They are asking that his own eternal nature shall become other than it is. One thing only they can do. They for themselves, by changing their own courses, can make the law which they have broken thenceforward their friend. Their dispositions and nature will revive and become healthy again when they are no longer in opposition to the will of their Maker. This is the natural action of what we call repentance. But the penalties of the wrongs of the past remain unrepealed. As men have sown they must still reap. The profligate who has ruined his health or fortune may learn before he dies that he has lived as a fool, and may recover something of his peace of mind as he recovers his understanding; but no miracle takes away his paralysis, or gives back to his

children the bread of which he has robbed them. He may himself be pardoned, but the consequences of his acts remain.

Once more: and it is the most awful feature of our condition. The laws of nature are general, and are no respecters of persons. There has been and there still is a clinging impression that the sufferings of men are the results of their own particular misdeeds, and that no one is or can be punished for the faults of others. I shall not dispute about the word 'punishment.' 'The fathers have eaten sour grapes,' said the Jewish proverb, 'and the children's teeth are set on edge.' So said Jewish experience, and Ezekiel answered that these words should no longer be used among them. 'The soul that sinneth, it shall die.' Yes, there is a promise that the soul shall be saved, there is no such promise for the body. Every man is the architect of his own character, and if to the extent of his opportunities he has lived purely, nobly, and uprightly, the misfortunes which may fall on him through the crimes or errors of other men cannot injure the immortal part of him. But it is no less true that we are made dependent one upon another to a degree which can hardly be exaggerated. The winds and waves are on the side of the best navigator—the seaman who best understands them. Place a fool at the helm, and crew and passengers will perish, be they ever so innocent. The Tower of Siloam fell, not for any sins of the eighteen who were crushed by it, but through bad mortar probably, the rotting of a beam, or the uneven setting

of the foundations. The persons who should have suffered, according to our notion of distributive justice, were the ignorant architects or masons who had done their work amiss. But the guilty had perhaps long been turned to dust. And the law of gravity brought the tower down at its own time, indifferent to the persons who might be under it.

Now the feature which distinguishes man from other animals is that he is able to observe and discover these laws which are of such mighty moment to him, and direct his conduct in conformity with them. The more subtle may be revealed only by complicated experience. The plainer and more obvious—among those especially which are called moral—have been apprehended among the higher races easily and readily. I shall not ask how the knowledge of them has been obtained, whether by external revelation, or by natural insight, or by some other influence working through human faculties. The fact is all that we are concerned with, that from the earliest times of which we have historical knowledge there have always been men who have recognised the distinction between the nobler and baser parts of their being. They have perceived that if they would be men and not beasts, they must control their animal passions, prefer truth to falsehood, courage to cowardice, justice to violence, and compassion to cruelty. These are the elementary principles of morality, on the recognition of which the welfare and improvement of mankind depend, and human history has been little more than a record of the

struggle which began at the beginning, and will continue to the end between the few who have had ability to see into the truth and loyalty to obey it, and the multitude who by evasion or rebellion have hoped to thrive in spite of it.

Thus we see that in the better sort of men there are two elementary convictions; that there is over all things an unsleeping, inflexible, all-ordering, just power, and that this power governs the world by laws which can be seen in their effects, and on the obedience to which, and on nothing else, human welfare depends.

And now I will suppose some one whose tendencies are naturally healthy, though as yet no special occasion shall have roused him to serious thought, growing up in a civilised community where, as usually happens, a compromise has been struck between vice and virtue, where a certain difference between right and wrong is recognised decently on the surface, while below it one half of the people are rushing steadily after the thing called pleasure, and the other half labouring in drudgery to provide the means of it for the idle.

Of practical justice in such a community there will be exceedingly little, but as society cannot go along at all without paying morality some outward homage, there will of course be an established religion—an Olympus, a Valhalla, or some system of a theogony or theology, with temples, priests, liturgies, public confessions in one form or another of the dependence of the things we see upon what is not seen, with certain ideas of duty and penalties im-

posed for neglect of it. These there will be, and also, as obedience is disagreeable and requires abstinence from various indulgences, there will be contrivances by which the indulgences can be secured and no harm come of it. By the side of the moral law there grows up a law of ceremonial observance, to which is attached a notion of superior sanctity and especial obligation. Morality, though not at first disowned, is slighted as comparatively trivial. Duty in the high sense comes to mean religious duty, that is to say, the attentive observance of certain forms and ceremonies, and these forms and ceremonies come into collision little or not at all with ordinary life, and ultimately have a tendency to resolve themselves into payments of money.

Thus rises what is called idolatry. I do not mean by idolatry the mere worship of manufactured images. I mean the separation between practical obligation, and new moons and sabbaths, outward acts of devotion, or formulas of particular opinions. It is a state of things perpetually recurring; for there is nothing, if it would only act, more agreeable to all parties concerned. Priests find their office magnified and their consequence increased. Laymen can be in favour with God and man, so priests tell them, while their enjoyments or occupations are in no way interfered with. The mischief is that the laws of nature remain meanwhile unsuspended; and all the functions of society become poisoned through neglect of them. Religion, which ought to have been a restraint, becomes a fresh instrument of evil—to the

imaginative and the weak a contemptible superstition, to the educated a mockery, to knaves and hypocrites a cloak of iniquity, to all alike—to those who suffer and those who seem to profit by it—a lie so palpable as to be worse than atheism itself.

There comes a time when all this has to end. The over-indulgence of the few is the over-penury of the many. Injustice begets misery, and misery resentment. Something happens perhaps—some unusual oppression, or some act of religious mendacity especially glaring. Such a person as I am supposing asks himself, 'What is the meaning of these things?' His eyes are opened. Gradually he discovers that he is living surrounded with falsehood, drinking lies like water, his conscience polluted, his intellect degraded by the abominations which envelop his existence. At first perhaps he will feel most keenly for himself. He will not suppose that he can set to rights a world that is out of joint, but he will himself relinquish his share in what he detests and despises. He withdraws into himself. If what others are doing and saying is obviously wrong, then he has to ask himself what is right, and what is the true purpose of his existence. Light breaks more clearly on him. He becomes conscious of impulses towards something purer and higher than he has yet experienced or even imagined. Whence these impulses come he cannot tell. He is too keenly aware of the selfish and cowardly thoughts which rise up to mar and thwart his nobler aspirations to believe that they can possibly be his own. If he conquers his baser

nature he feels that he is conquering himself. The conqueror and the conquered cannot be the same; and he therefore concludes, not in vanity, but in profound humiliation and self-abasement, that the infinite grace of God and nothing else is rescuing him from destruction. He is converted, as the theologians say. He sets his face upon another road from that which he has hitherto travelled, and to which he can never return. It has been no merit of his own. His disposition will rather be to exaggerate his own worthlessness, that he may exalt the more what has been done for him, and he resolves thenceforward to enlist himself as a soldier on the side of truth and right, and to have no wishes, no desires, no opinions but what the service of his Master imposes. Like a soldier he abandons his freedom, desiring only like a soldier to act and speak no longer as of himself, but as commissioned from some supreme authority. In such a condition a man becomes magnetic. There are epidemics of nobleness as well as epidemics of disease; and he infects others with his own enthusiasm. Even in the most corrupt ages there are always more persons than we suppose who in their hearts rebel against the prevailing fashions; one takes courage from another, one supports another; communities form themselves with higher principles of action and purer intellectual beliefs. As their numbers multiply they catch fire with a common idea and a common indignation, and ultimately burst out into open war with the lies and iniquities that surround them.

I have been describing a natural process which has

repeated itself many times in human history, and, unless the old opinion that we are more than animated clay, and that our nature has nobler affinities, dies away into a dream, will repeat itself at recurring intervals, so long as our race survives upon the planet.

I have told you generally what I conceive to be our real position, and the administration under which we live; and I have indicated how naturally the conviction of the truth would tend to express itself in the moral formulas of Calvinism. I will now run briefly over the most remarkable of the great historical movements to which I have alluded; and you will see, in the striking recurrence of the same peculiar mode of thought and action, an evidence that, if not completely accurate, it must possess some near and close affinity with the real fact. I will take first the example with which we are all most familiar—that of the chosen people. I must again remind you that I am not talking of theology. I say nothing of what is called technically revelation. I am treating these matters as phenomena of human experience, the lessons of which would be identically the same if no revelation existed.

The discovery of the key to the hieroglyphics, the excavations in the tombs, the investigations carried on by a series of careful enquirers, from Belzoni to Lepsius, into the antiquities of the Valley of Nile, interpreting and in turn interpreted by Manetho and Herodotus, have thrown a light in many respects singularly clear upon the condition of the first country which, so far as history can tell, succeeded

in achieving a state of high civilisation. From a period the remoteness of which it is unsafe to conjecture there had been established in Egypt an elaborate and splendid empire which, though it had not escaped revolutions, had suffered none which had caused organic changes there. It had strength, wealth, power, coherence, a vigorous monarchy, dominant and exclusive castes of nobles and priests, and a proletariat of slaves. Its cities, temples, and monuments are still, in their ruin, the admiration of engineers and the despair of architects. Original intellectual conceptions inspired its public buildings. Saved by situation, like China, from the intrusion of barbarians, it developed at leisure its own ideas, undisturbed from without; and when it becomes historically visible to us it was in the zenith of its glory. The habits of the higher classes were elaborately luxurious, and the vanity and the self-indulgence of the few were made possible—as it is and always must be where vanity and self-indulgence exist—by the oppression and misery of the millions. You can see on the sides of the tombs—for their pride and their pomp followed them even in their graves—the effeminate patrician of the court of the Pharaohs reclining in his gilded gondola, the attendant eunuch waiting upon him with the goblet or plate of fruit, the bevies of languishing damsels fluttering round him in their transparent draperies. Shakespeare's Cleopatra might have sate for the portrait of the Potiphar's wife who tried the virtue of the son of Jacob:

> The barge she sate in, like a burnished throne,
> Burned on the water: the poop was beaten gold;
> Purple the sails, and so perfumed that
> The winds were love-sick with them. . . .
> For her own person,
> It beggared all description: she did lie
> In her pavilion—cloth-of-gold of tissue—
> O'er-picturing that Venus where we see
> The fancy out-work nature: on each side her
> Stood pretty dimpled boys, like smiling Cupids,
> With divers-coloured fans, whose wind did seem
> To glow the delicate cheeks which they did cool,
> And what they did, undid.

By the side of all this there was a no less elaborate religion—an ecclesiastical hierarchy—powerful as the sacerdotalism of Mediæval Europe, with a creed in the middle of it which was a complicated idolatry of the physical forces.

There are at bottom but two possible religions—that which rises in the moral nature of man, and which takes shape in moral commandments, and that which grows out of the observation of the material energies which operate in the external universe. The sun at all times has been the central object of this material reverence. The sun was the parent of light; the sun was the lord of the sky and the lord of the seasons; at the sun's bidding the earth brought forth her harvests and ripened them to maturity. The sun, too, was beneficent to the good and to the evil, and, like the laws of political economy, drew no harsh distinctions between one person and another. It demanded only that certain work should be done, and smiled equally on the crops of the slave-driver and the garden of the innocent peasant. The moon, when the sun sunk to his night's rest, reigned as his

vicegerent, the queen of the revolving heavens, and in her waxing and waning and singular movement among the stars was the perpetual occasion of admiring and adoring curiosity. Nature in all her forms was wonderful; Nature in her beneficent forms was to be loved and worshipped; and being, as Nature is, indifferent to morality, bestowing prosperity on principles which make no demands on chastity or equity, she is, in one form or other, the divinity on whose shrine in all ages the favoured sections of society have always gladly paid their homage. Where Nature is sovereign, there is no need of austerity and self-denial. The object of life is the pursuit of wealth and the pleasures which wealth can purchase; and the rules for our practical guidance are the laws, as the economists say, by which wealth can be acquired.

It is an excellent creed for those who have the happiness to profit by it, and will have its followers to the end of time. In these later ages it connects itself with the natural sciences, progress of the intellect, specious shadows of all kinds which will not interfere with its supreme management of political arrangements. In Egypt, where knowledge was in its rudiments, every natural force, the minutest plant or animal, which influenced human fortunes for good or evil, came in for a niche in the shrine of the temples of the sun and moon. Snakes and crocodiles, dogs, cats, cranes, and beetles were propitiated by sacrifices, by laboured ceremonials of laudation; nothing living was too mean to find a place in the omnivorous devotionalism of the Egyptian clergy. We, in these days, proud as we may be of our intellectual advances, need not ridicule popular

credulity. Even here in Scotland, not so long ago, wretched old women were supposed to run about the country in the shape of hares. At this very hour the ablest of living natural philosophers is looking gravely to the courtships of moths and butterflies to solve the problem of the origin of man, and prove his descent from an African baboon.

There was, however, in ancient Egypt another article of faith besides nature-worship of transcendent moment—a belief which had probably descended from earlier and purer ages, and had then originated in the minds of sincere and earnest men—as a solution of the real problem of humanity. The inscriptions and paintings in the tombs near Thebes make it perfectly clear that the Egyptians looked forward to a future state—to the judgment-bar of Osiris, where they would each one day stand to give account for their actions. They believed as clearly as we do, and with a conviction of a very similar kind, that those who had done good would go to everlasting life, and those who had done evil into eternal perdition.

Such a belief, if coupled with an accurate perception of what good and evil mean—with a distinct certainty that men will be tried by the moral law, before a perfectly just judge, and that no subterfuges will avail—cannot but exercise a most profound and most tremendous influence upon human conduct. And yet our own experience, if nothing else, proves that this belief, when moulded into traditional and conventional shapes, may lose its practical power; nay, without ceasing to be professed, and even sincerely

held, may become more mischievous than salutary. And this is owing to the fatal distinction of which I spoke just now, which seems to have an irresistible tendency to shape itself, in civilised societies, between religious and moral duties. With the help of this distinction it becomes possible for a man, as long as he avoids gross sins, to neglect every one of his positive obligations—to be careless, selfish, unscrupulous, indifferent to everything but his own pleasures—and to imagine all the time that his condition is perfectly satisfactory, and that he can look forward to what is before him without the slightest uneasiness. All accounts represent the Egyptians as an eminently religious people. No profanity was tolerated there, no scepticism, no insolent disobedience to the established priesthood. If a doubt ever crossed the mind of some licentious philosopher as to the entire sacredness of the stainless Apis, if ever a question forced itself on him whether the Lord of heaven and earth could really be incarnated in the stupidest of created beasts, he kept his counsels to himself, if he was not shocked at his own impiety. The priests, who professed supernatural powers—the priests, who were in communication with the gods themselves—they possessed the keys of the sacred mysteries, and what was Philosophy that it should lift its voice against them? The word of the priest—nine parts a charlatan, and one part, perhaps, himself imposed on—was absolute. He knew the counsels of Osiris, he knew that the question which would be asked at the dread tribunal was not whether a man had been just

and true and merciful, but whether he had believed what he was told to believe, and had duly paid the fees to the temple. And so the world went its way, controlled by no dread of retribution; and on the tomb-frescoes you can see legions of slaves under the lash dragging from the quarries the blocks of granite which were to form the eternal monuments of the Pharaohs' tyranny; and you read in the earliest authentic history that when there was a fear that the slave-races should multiply so fast as to be dangerous their babies were flung to the crocodiles.

One of these slave-races rose at last in revolt. Noticeably it did not rise against oppression as such, or directly in consequence of oppression. We hear of no massacre of slave-drivers, no burning of towns or villages, none of the usual accompaniments of peasant insurrections. If Egypt was plagued, it was not by mutinous mobs or incendiaries. Half a million men simply rose up and declared that they could endure no longer the mendacity, the hypocrisy, the vile and incredible rubbish which was offered to them in the sacred name of religion. 'Let us go,' they said, into the wilderness, go out of these soft water-meadows and cornfields, forsake our leeks and our fleshpots, and take in exchange a life of hardship and wandering, 'that we may worship the God of our fathers.' Their leader had been trained in the wisdom of the Egyptians, and among the rocks of Sinai had learnt that it was wind and vanity. The half-obscured traditions of his ancestors awoke to life again, and were rekindled by him in his people.

They would bear with lies no longer. They shook the dust of Egypt from their feet, and the prate and falsehood of it from their souls, and they withdrew, with all belonging to them, into the Arabian desert, that they might no longer serve cats and dogs and bulls and beetles, but the Eternal Spirit who had been pleased to make his existence known to them. They sung no pæans of liberty. They were delivered from the house of bondage, but it was the bondage of mendacity, and they left it only to assume another service. The Eternal had taken pity on them. In revealing his true nature to them, he had taken them for his children. They were not their own, but his, and they laid their lives under commandments which were as close a copy as, with the knowledge which they possessed, they could make, to the moral laws of the maker of the universe. In essentials the Book of the Law was a covenant of practical justice. Rewards and punishments were alike immediate, both to each separate person and to the collective nation. Retribution in a life to come was dropped out of sight, not denied, but not insisted on. The belief in it had been corrupted to evil, and rather enervated than encouraged the efforts after present equity. Every man was to reap as he had sown—here, in the immediate world—to live under his own vine and fig-tree, and thrive or suffer according to his actual deserts. Religion was not a thing of past or future, an account of things that had been, or of things which one day would be again. God was the actual living ruler of real every-day life; nature-worship was swept away, and in the warmth and

passion of conviction they became, as I said, the soldiers of a purer creed. In Palestine, where they found idolatry in a form yet fouler and more cruel than what they had left behind them, they trampled it out as if in inspired abomination of a system of which the fruits were so detestable. They were not perfect—very far from perfect. An army at best is made of mixed materials, and war, of all ways of making wrong into right, is the harshest; but they were directed by a noble purpose, and they have left a mark never to be effaced in the history of the human race.

The fire died away. 'The Israelites,' we are told, 'mingled among the heathen and learned their works.' They ceased to be missionaries. They hardly and fitfully preserved the records of the meaning of their own exodus. Eight hundred years went by, and the flame rekindled in another country. Cities more splendid even than the hundred-gated Thebes itself had risen on the banks of the Euphrates. Grand military empires had been founded on war and conquest. Peace had followed when no enemies were left to conquer; and with peace had come philosophy, science, agricultural enterprise, magnificent engineering works for the draining and irrigation of the Mesopotamian plains. Temples and palaces towered into the sky. The pomp and luxury of Asia rivalled, and even surpassed, the glories of Egypt; and by the side of it a second nature-worship, which, if less elaborately absurd, was more deeply detestable. The foulest vices were consecrated to the

service of the gods, and the holiest ceremonies were inoculated with impurity and sensuality.

The seventh century before the Christian era was distinguished over the whole East by extraordinary religious revolutions. With the most remarkable of these, that which bears the name of Buddha, I am not here concerned. Buddhism has been the creed for more than two thousand years of half the human race, but it left unaffected our own western world, and therefore I here pass it by.

Simultaneously with Buddha, there appeared another teacher, Zerdusht, or, as the Greeks called him, Zoroaster, among the hardy tribes of the Persian mountains. He taught a creed which, like that of the Israelites, was essentially moral and extremely simple. Nature-worship, as I said, knew nothing of morality. When the objects of natural idolatry became personified, and physical phenomena were metamorphosed into allegorical mythology, the indifference to morality which was obvious in nature became ascribed as a matter of course to gods which were but nature in a personal disguise. Zoroaster, like Moses, saw behind the physical forces into the deeper laws of right and wrong. He supposed himself to discover two antagonist powers contending in the heart of man as well as in the outward universe—a spirit of light and a spirit of darkness, a spirit of truth and a spirit of falsehood, a spirit life-giving and beautiful, a spirit poisonous and deadly. To one or other of these powers man was necessarily in servitude. As the follower of Ormuzd, he became

enrolled in the celestial armies, whose business was to fight against sin and misery, against wrong-doing and impurity, against injustice and lies and baseness of all sorts and kinds; and every one with a soul in him to prefer good to evil was summoned to the holy wars, which would end at last after ages in the final overthrow of Ahriman.

The Persians caught rapidly Zoroaster's spirit. Uncorrupted by luxury, they responded eagerly to a voice which they recognised as speaking truth to them. They have been called the Puritans of the Old World. Never any people, it is said, hated idolatry as they hated it, and for the simple reason that they hated lies. A Persian lad, Herodotus tells us, was educated in three especial accomplishments. He was taught to ride, to shoot, and to speak the truth—that is to say, he was brought up to be brave, active, valiant, and upright. When a man speaks the truth, you may count pretty surely that he possesses most other virtues. Half the vices in the world rise out of cowardice, and one who is afraid of lying is usually afraid of nothing else. Speech is an article of trade in which we are all dealers, and the one beyond all others where we are most bound to provide honest wares:

> ἔχθρός μοι κάκεινος ὁμῶς Ἀΐδαο πυλαῖσιν
> ὅς θ' ἕτερόν μεν κευθῇ ἐνὶ φρέσιν ἄλλο δὲ εἰπῇ.

This seems to have been the Persian temperament, and in virtue of it they were chosen as the instruments—clearly recognised as such by the Prophet Isaiah for one—which were to sweep the earth

clean of abominations, which had grown to an intolerable height. Bel bowed down, and Nebo had to stoop before them. Babylon, the lady of kingdoms, was laid in the dust, and 'her stargazers and her astrologers and her monthly prognosticators' could not save her with all their skill. They and she were borne away together. Egypt's turn followed. Retribution had been long delayed, but her cup ran over at last. The palm-groves were flung into the river, the temples polluted, the idols mutilated. The precious Apis, for all its godhood, was led with a halter before the Persian king, and stabbed in the sight of the world by Persian steel.

'Profane!' exclaimed the priests, as pious persons, on like occasions, have exclaimed a thousand times: 'these Puritans have no reverence for holy things.' Rather it is because they do reverence things which deserve reverence that they loathe and abhor the counterfeit. What does an ascertained imposture deserve but to be denied, exposed, insulted, trampled under foot, danced upon, if nothing less will serve, till the very geese take courage and venture to hiss derision? Are we to wreathe aureoles round the brows of phantasms lest we shock the sensibilities of the idiots who have believed them to be divine? Was the Prophet Isaiah so tender in his way of treating such matters?

Who hath formed a god, or molten a graven image that is profitable for nothing? He heweth him down cedars. He taketh the cypress and the oak from the trees of the forest. He burneth part thereof in the fire; with part thereof he eateth flesh. He roasteth roast, and is satisfied: yea, he warmeth himself, and saith, Aha, I am warm, I have seen

the fire: and the residue thereof he maketh a god, even his graven image: he falleth down unto it, and worshippeth it, and prayeth unto it, and saith, Deliver me; for thou art my god.

Enter into the rock, and hide thee in the dust, for fear of the Lord, for the glory of His majesty when He ariseth to shake terribly the earth. In that day a man shall cast his idols of silver and gold, which they made each one for himself to worship, to the moles and the bats.

Again events glide on. Persia runs the usual course. Virtue and truth produced strength, strength dominion, dominion riches, riches luxury, and luxury weakness and collapse—fatal sequence repeated so often, yet to so little purpose. The hardy warrior of the mountains degenerated into a vulgar sybarite. His manliness became effeminacy; his piety a ritual of priests; himself a liar, a coward, and a slave. The Greeks conquered the Persians, copied their manners, and fell in turn before the Romans. We count little more than 500 years from the fall of Babylon, and the entire known world was lying at the feet of a great military despotism. Coming originally themselves from the East, the classic nations had brought with them also the primæval nature-worship of Asia. The Greek imagination had woven the Eastern metaphors into a singular mythology, in which the gods were represented as beings possessing in a splendid degree physical beauty, physical strength, with the kind of awfulness which belonged to their origin; the fitful, wanton, changeable, yet also terrible powers of the elemental world. Translated into the language of humanity, the actions and adventures thus ascribed

to the gods became in process of time impossible to be believed. Intellect expanded; moral sense grew more vigorous, and with it the conviction that if the national traditions were true man must be more just than his Maker. In Æschylus and Sophocles, in Pindar and Plato, you see conscience asserting its sovereignty over the most sacred beliefs—instinctive reverence and piety struggling sometimes to express themselves under the names and forms of the past, sometimes bursting out uncontrollably into indignant abhorrence:

> *Ἐμοὶ δ' ἄπορα γαστρίμαργον*
> *Μακάρων τιν' εἰπεῖν·*
> *Ἀφίσταμαι . . .*
> *καὶ πού τι καὶ βροτῶν φρένας*
> *ὑπὲρ τὸν ἀλαθῆ λόγον*
> *δεδαιδάλμενοι ψεύδεσι ποικίλοις*
> *ἐξαπατῶντι μύθοι.*
> *Χάρισδ' ἄπερ ἅπαντα τεύχει*
> *τὰ μείλιχα θνατοῖς*
> *ἐπιφέροισα τιμὰν*
> *καὶ ἄπιστον ἐμήσατο πίστον*
> *ἔμμεναι τὸ πόλλακις.*

> To me 'twere strange indeed
> To charge the blessed gods with greed.
> I dare not do it. . . . .
> Myths too oft,
> With quaintly coloured lies enwrought,
> To stray from truth have mortals brought.
> And Art, which round all things below
> A charm of loveliness can throw,
> Has robed the false in honour's hue,
> And made the unbelievable seem true.

'All religions,' says Gibbon, 'are to the vulgar equally true, to the philosopher equally false, and to

the statesman equally useful:' thus scornfully summing up the theory of the matter which he found to be held by the politicians of the age which he was describing, and perhaps of his own. Religion, as a moral force, died away with the establishment of the Roman Empire, and with it died probity, patriotism, and human dignity, and all that men had learnt in nobler ages to honour and to value as good. Order reigned unbroken under the control of the legions. Industry flourished, and natural science, and most of the elements of what we now call civilisation. Ships covered the seas. Huge towns adorned the Imperial provinces. The manners of men became more artificial, and in a certain sense more humane. Religion was a State establishment—a decent acknowledgment of a power or powers which, if they existed at all, amused themselves in the depths of space, careless, so their deity was not denied, of the woe or weal of humanity: the living fact, supreme in Church and State, being the wearer of the purple, who, as the practical realisation of authority, assumed the name as well as the substance. The one god immediately known to man was thenceforth the Divus Cæsar, whose throne in the sky was waiting empty for him till his earthly exile was ended, and it pleased him to join or rejoin his kindred divinities.

It was the era of atheism—atheism such as this earth never witnessed before or since. You who have read Tacitus know the practical fruits of it, as they appeared at the heart of the system in the second Babylon, the proud city of the seven hills.

You will remember how, for the crime of a single slave, the entire household of a Roman patrician, four hundred innocent human beings, were led in chains across the Forum and murdered by what was called law. You will remember the exquisite Nero, who, in his love of art, to throw himself more fully into the genius of Greek tragedy, committed incest with his mother that he might be a second Œdipus, and assassinated her that he might realise the sensations of Orestes. You will recall one scene which Tacitus describes, not as exceptional or standing alone, but merely, he says, 'quas ut exemplum referam ne sæpius eadem prodigentia narranda sit'—the hymeneal night-banquet on Agrippa's lake, graced by the presence of the wives and daughters of the Roman senators, where amidst blazing fireworks and music and cloth-of-gold pavilions and naked prostitutes, the majesty of the Cæsars celebrated his nuptials with a boy.

There, I conceive, was the visible product of material civilisation, where there was no fear of God in the middle of it—the final outcome of wealth and prosperity and art and culture, raised aloft as a sign for all ages to look upon.

But it is not to this, nor to the fire of hell which in due time burst out to consume it, that I desire now to draw your attention. I have to point out to you two purifying movements which were at work in the midst of the pollution, one of which came to nothing and survives only in books, the second a force which was to mould for ages the future history of man. Both require our notice, for both singularly

contained the particular feature which is called the reproach of Calvinism.

The blackest night is never utterly dark. When mankind seem most abandoned there are always a seven thousand somewhere who have not bowed the knee to the fashionable opinions of the hour. Among the great Roman families a certain number remained republican in feeling and republican in habit. The State religion was as incredible to them as to every one else. They could not persuade themselves that they could discover the will of Heaven in the colour of a calf's liver or in the appetite of the sacred chickens; but they had retained the moral instincts of their citizen ancestors. They knew nothing of God or the gods, but they had something in themselves which made sensuality nauseating instead of pleasant to them. They had an austere sense of the meaning of the word 'duty.' They could distinguish and reverence the nobler possibilities of their nature. They disdained what was base and effeminate, and, though religion failed them, they constructed out of philosophy a rule which would serve to live by. Stoicism is a not unnatural refuge of thoughtful men in confused and sceptical ages. It adheres rigidly to morality. It offers no easy Epicurean explanation of the origin of man, which resolves him into an organisation of particles, and dismisses him again into nothingness. It recognises only that men who are the slaves of their passions are miserable and impotent, and insists that personal inclinations shall be subordinated to conscience. It prescribes plainness

of life, that the number of our necessities may be as few as possible, and in placing the business of life in intellectual and moral action, it destroys the temptation to sensual gratifications. It teaches a contempt of death so complete that it can be encountered without a flutter of the pulse; and, while it raises men above the suffering which makes others miserable, generates a proud submissiveness to sorrow which noblest natures feel most keenly, by representing this huge scene and the shows which it presents as the work of some unknown but irresistible force, against which it is vain to struggle and childish to repine.

As with Calvinism, a theoretic belief in an overruling will or destiny was not only compatible with but seemed naturally to issue in the control of the animal appetites. The Stoic did not argue that, 'as fate governs all things, I can do no wrong, and therefore I will take my pleasure;' but rather, 'The moral law within me is the noblest part of my being and compels me to submit to it.' He did not withdraw from the world like the Christian anchorite. He remained at his post in the senate, the Forum, or the army. A Stoic in Marcus Aurelius gave a passing dignity to the dishonoured purple. In Tacitus, Stoicism has left an eternal evidence how grand a creature man may be, though unassisted by conscious dependence on external spiritual help, through steady disdain of what is base, steady reverence for all that deserves to be revered, and inflexible integrity in word and deed.

But Stoicism could under no circumstances be a

regenerating power in the general world. It was a position only tenable to the educated; it was without hope and without enthusiasm. From a contempt of the objects which mankind most desired, the step was short and inevitable to contempt of mankind themselves. Wrapped in mournful self-dependence, the Stoic could face calmly for himself whatever lot the fates might send:

> Si fractus illabatur orbis,
> Impavidum ferient ruinæ.

But, natural as such a creed might be in a Roman noble under the Empire, natural perhaps as it may always be in corrupted ages and amidst disorganised beliefs, the very sternness of Stoicism was repellent. It carried no consolation to the hearts of the suffering millions, who were in no danger of being led away by luxury, because their whole lives were passed in poverty and wretchedness. It was individual, not missionary. The Stoic declared no active war against corruption. He stood alone, protesting scornfully in silent example against evils which he was without power to cure. Like Cæsar, he folded himself in his mantle. The world might do its worst. He would keep his own soul unstained.

Place beside the Stoics their contemporaries the Galilean fishermen and the tentmaker of Tarsus. I am not about to sketch in a few paragraphs the rise of Christianity. I mean only to point to the principles on which the small knot of men gathered themselves together who were about to lay the foundations of a vast spiritual revolution. The guilt

and wretchedness in which the world was steeped St. Paul felt as keenly as Tacitus. Like Tacitus, too, he believed that the wild and miserable scene which he beheld was no result of accident, but had been ordained so to be, and was the direct expression of an all-mastering Power. But he saw also that this Power was no blind necessity or iron chain of connected cause and effect, but a perfectly just, perfectly wise being, who governed all things by the everlasting immutable laws of his own nature; that when these laws were resisted or forgotten they wrought ruin and confusion and slavery to death and sin; that when they were recognised and obeyed the curse would be taken away, and freedom and manliness come back again. Whence the disobedience had first risen was a problem which St. Paul solved in a manner not all unlike the Persians. There was a rebellious spirit in the universe, penetrating into men's hearts, and prompting them to disloyalty and revolt. It removed the question a step further back without answering it, but the fact was plain as the sunlight. Men had neglected the laws of their Maker. In neglecting them they had brought universal ruin, not on themselves only, but on all society, and if the world was to be saved from destruction they must be persuaded or forced back into their allegiance. The law itself had been once more revealed on the mountains of Palestine, and in the person and example of One who had lived and died to make it known; and those who had heard and known Him, being possessed with His spirit, felt themselves commissioned

as a missionary legion to publish the truth to mankind. They were not, like the Israelites or the Persians, to fight with the sword—not even in their own defence. The sword can take life, but not give it; and the command to the Apostles was to sow the invisible seed in the hotbed of corruption, and feed and foster it, and water it, with the blood, not of others, but themselves. Their own wills, ambitions, hopes, desires, emotions, were swallowed up in the will to which they had surrendered themselves. They were soldiers. It was St. Paul's metaphor, and no other is so appropriate. They claimed no merit through their calling; they were too conscious of their own sins to indulge in the poisonous reflection that they were not as other men. They were summoned out on their allegiance, and armed with the spiritual strength which belongs to the consciousness of a just cause. If they indulged any personal hope, it was only that their weaknesses would not be remembered against them—that, having been chosen for a work in which the victory was assured, they would be made themselves worthy of their calling, and, though they might slide, would not be allowed to fall. Many mysteries remained unsolved. Man was as clay in the potter's hand—one vessel was made to honour and another to dishonour. Why, who could tell? This only they knew, that they must themselves do no dishonour to the spirit that was in them—gain others, gain all who would join them for their common purpose, and fight with all their souls against ignorance and sin.

The fishermen of Gennesaret planted Christianity, and many a winter and many a summer have since rolled over it. More than once it has shed its leaves and seemed to be dying, and when the buds burst again the colour of the foliage was changed. The theory of it which is taught to-day in the theological schools of St. Andrew's would have sounded strange from the pulpit of your once proud cathedral. As the same thought expresses itself in many languages, so spiritual truths assume ever-varying forms. The garment fades —the moths devour it—the woven fibres disintegrate and turn to dust. The idea only is immortal, and never fades. The hermit who made his cell below the cliff where the cathedral stands, the monkish architect who designed the plan of it, the princes who brought it to perfection, the Protestants who shattered it into ruin, the preacher of last Sunday at the University church, would have many a quarrel were they to meet now before they would understand each other. But at the bottom of the minds of all the same thought would be predominant—that they were soldiers of the Almighty, commissioned to fight with lies and selfishness, and that all alike, they and those against whom they were contending, were in his hands, to deal with after his own pleasure.

Again six centuries go by. Christianity becomes the religion of the Roman Empire. The Empire divides, and the Church is divided with it. Europe is overrun by the Northern nations. The power of the Western Cæsars breaks in pieces, but the Western Church stands erect, makes its way into the hearts of

the conquerors, penetrates the German forests, opens a path into Britain and Ireland. By the noble Gothic nations it is welcomed with passionate enthusiasm. The warriors of Odin are transformed into a Christian chivalry, and the wild Valhalla into a Christian Heaven. Fiery, passionate nations are not tamed in a generation or a century, but a new conception of what was praiseworthy and excellent had taken hold of their imagination and the understanding. Kings, when their day of toil was over, laid down crown and sword, and retired into cloisters, to pass what remained of life to them in prayers and meditations on eternity. The supreme object of reverence was no longer the hero of the battlefield, but the barefoot missionary who was carrying the Gospel among the tribes that were still untaught. So beautiful in their conception of him was the character of one of these wandering priests that their stories formed a new mythology. So vast were the real miracles which they were working on men's souls that wonders of a more ordinary sort were assigned to them as a matter of course. They raised the dead, they healed the sick, they cast out devils with a word or with the sign of the cross. Plain facts were too poor for the enthusiasm of German piety; and noble human figures were exhibited, as it were, in the resplendent light of a painted window in the effort to do them exaggerated honour.

It was pity, for truth only smells sweet for ever, and illusions, however innocent, are deadly as the canker-worm. Long cycles had to pass before the fruit of

these poison-seeds would ripen. The practical result meanwhile was to substitute in the minds of the sovereign races which were to take the lead in the coming era the principles of the moral law for the law of force and the sword.

The Eastern branch of the divided Church experienced meanwhile a less happy fortune. In the East there was no virgin soil like the great noble Teutonic peoples. Asia was a worn-out stage on which drama after drama of history had been played and played out. Languid luxury only was there, huge aggregation of wealth in particular localities, and the no less inevitable shadow attached to luxury by the necessities of things, oppression and misery and squalor. Christianity and the world had come to terms after the established fashion—the world to be let alone in its pleasures and its sins ; the Church relegated to opinion, with free liberty to split doctrinal hairs to the end of time. The work of the Church's degradation had begun, even before it accepted the tainted hand of Constantine. Already in the third century speculative Christianity had become the fashionable creed of Alexandria, and had purchased the favour of patrician congregations, if not by open tolerance of vice, yet by leaving it to grow unresisted. St. Clement details contemptuously the inventory of the boudoir of a fine lady of his flock, the list of essences on her toilet-table, the shoes, sandals, and slippers with which her dainty feet were decorated in endless variety. He describes her as she ascends the steps of the βασιλική, to which she was going for what she

called her prayers, with a page lifting up her train. He paints her as she walks along the street, her petticoats projecting with some horsehair arrangement behind, and the street boys jeering at her as she passes.

All that Christianity was meant to do in making life simple and habits pure was left undone, while, with a few exceptions, like that of St. Clement himself, the intellectual energy of its bishops and teachers was exhausted in spinning endless cobwebs of metaphysical theology. Human life at the best is enveloped in darkness; we know not what we are or whither we are bound. Religion is the light by which we are to see our way along the moral pathways without straying into the brake or the morass. We are not to look at religion itself, but at surrounding things with the help of religion. If we fasten our attention upon the light itself, analysing it into its component rays, speculating on the union and composition of the substances of which it is composed, not only will it no longer serve us for a guide, but our dazzled senses lose their natural powers; we should grope our way more safely in conscious blindness.

When the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness.

In the place of the old material idolatry we erect a new idolatry of words and phrases. Our duty is no longer to be true, and honest, and brave, and self-denying, and pure, but to be exact in our formulas, to hold accurately some nice and curious proposition,

to place damnation in straying a hair's breadth from some symbol which exults in being unintelligible, and salvation in the skill with which the mind can balance itself on some intellectual tightrope.

There is no more instructive phenomenon in history than the ease and rapidity with which the Arabian caliphs lopped off the fairest provinces of the Eastern Empire. When nations are easily conquered, we may be sure that they have first lost their moral self-respect. When their religions, as they call them, go down at a breath, those religions have become already but bubbles of vapour. The laws of Heaven are long-enduring, but their patience comes to an end at last. Because justice is not executed speedily men persuade themselves that there is no such thing as justice. But the lame foot, as the Greek proverb said, overtakes the swift one in the end; and the longer the forbearance the sharper the retribution when it comes.

As the Greek theology was one of the most complicated accounts ever offered of the nature of God and his relation to man, so the message of Mahomet, when he first unfolded the green banner, was one of the most simple. There is no god but God: God is King, and you must and shall obey his will. This was Islam, as it was first offered at the sword's point to people who had lost the power of understanding any other argument. Your images are wood and stone; your metaphysics are words without understanding; the world lies in wickedness and wretchedness because you have forgotten the statutes

of your Master, and you shall go back to those; you shall fulfil the purpose for which you were set to live upon the earth, or you shall not live at all.

Tremendous inroad upon the liberties of conscience! What right, it is asked, have those people that you have been calling soldiers of the Almighty to interfere by force with the opinions of others? Let them leave us alone; we meddle not with them. Let them, if they please, obey those laws they talk of; we have other notions of such things; we will obey ours, and let the result judge between us. The result was judging between them. The meek Apostle with no weapon but his word and his example, and winning victories by himself submitting to be killed, is a fairer object than a fierce Kaled, calling himself the sword of the Almighty. But we cannot order for ourselves in what way these things shall be. The caitiff Damascenes to whom Kaled gave the alternative of the Koran or death were men themselves, who had hands to hold a sword with if they had heart to use it, or a creed for which they cared to risk their lives. In such a quarrel superior strength and courage are the signs of the presence of a nobler conviction.

To the question, 'What right have you to interfere with us?' there is but one answer: 'We must. These things which we tell you are true; and in your hearts you know it; your own cowardice convicts you. The moral laws of your Maker are written in your consciences as well as in ours. If you disobey them, you bring disaster not only on your own

wretched selves, but on all around you. It is our common concern, and if you will not submit, in the name of our Master we will compel you.'

Any fanatic, it will be said, might use the same language. Is not history full of instances of dreamers or impostors, 'boasting themselves to be somebody,' who for some wild illusion, or for their own ambition, have thrown the world into convulsions? Is not Mahomet himself a signal—the most signal—illustration of it? I should say rather that when men have risen in arms for a false cause the event has proved it by the cause coming to nothing. The world is not so constituted that courage, and strength, and endurance, and organisation, and success long sustained are to be obtained in the service of falsehood. If I could think that, I should lose the most convincing reason for believing that we are governed by a moral power. The moral laws of our being execute themselves through the instrumentality of men; and in those great movements which determine the moral condition of many nations through many centuries, the stronger side, it seems to me, has uniformly been the better side, and stronger because it has been better.

I am not upholding Mahomet as if he had been a perfect man, or the Koran as a second Bible. The crescent was no sun, nor even a complete moon reigning full-orbed in the night heaven. The light there was in it was but reflected from the sacred books of the Jews and the Arab traditions. The morality of it was defective. The detailed conception of man's duties inferior, far inferior, to what

St. Martin and St. Patrick, St. Columba and St. Augustine were teaching or had taught in Western Europe. Mahometanism rapidly degenerated. The first caliphs stood far above Saladin. The descent from Saladin to a modern Moslem despot is like a fall over a precipice. All established things, nations, constitutions, all established things which have life in them, have also the seeds of death. They grow, they have their day of usefulness, they decay and pass away, 'lest one good custom should corrupt the world.'

But the light which there was in the Moslem creed was real. It taught the omnipotence and omnipresence of one eternal Spirit, the Maker and Ruler of all things, by whose everlasting purpose all things were, and whose will all things must obey; and this central truth, to which later experience and broader knowledge can add nothing, it has taught so clearly and so simply that in Islam there has been no room for heresy, and scarcely for schism.

The Koran has been accused of countenancing sensual vice. Rather it bridled and brought within limits a sensuality which before was unbounded. It forbade and has absolutely extinguished, wherever Islam is professed, the bestial drunkenness which is the disgrace of our Christian English and Scottish towns. Even now, after centuries of decay, the Mussulman probably governs his life by the Koran more accurately than most Christians obey the Sermon on the Mount or the Ten Commandments. In our own India, where the Moslem creed retains its relative superiority to the superstitions of the native

races, the Mussulman is a higher order of being. Were the English to withdraw he would retake the sovereignty of the peninsula by natural right—not because he has larger bones and sinews, but by superiority of intellect and heart; in other words, because he has a truer faith.

I said that while Christianity degenerated in the East with extreme rapidity, in the West it retained its firmer characters. It became the vitalising spirit of a new organisation of society. All that we call modern civilisation in a sense which deserves the name is the visible expression of the transforming power of the Gospel.

I said also that by the side of the healthy influences of regeneration there were sown along with it the germs of evil to come. All living ideas, from the necessity of things, take up into their constitutions whatever forces are already working round them. The most ardent aspirations after truth will not anticipate knowledge, and the errors of the imagination become consecrated as surely as the purest impulses of conscience. So long as the laws of the physical world remain a mystery, the action of all uncomprehended phenomena, the movements of the heavenly bodies, the winds and storms, famines, murrains, and human epidemics, are ascribed to the voluntary interference of supernatural beings. The belief in witches and fairies, in spells and talismans, could not be dispelled by science, for science did not exist. The Church therefore entered into competition with her evil rivals on their own

ground. The saint came into the field against the enchanters. The powers of charms and amulets were eclipsed by martyrs' relics, sacraments, and holy water. The magician, with the devil at his back, got to yield to the divine powers imparted to priests by spiritual descent in the imposition of hands.

Thus a gigantic system of supernaturalism overspread the entire Western world. There was no deliberate imposition. The clergy were as ignorant as the people of true relations between natural cause and effect. Their business, so far as they were conscious of their purpose, was to contend against the works of the devil. They saw practically that they were able to convert men from violence and impurity to piety and self-restraint. Their very humility forbade them to attribute such wonderful results to their own teaching. When it was universally believed that human beings could make covenants with Satan by signing their names in blood, what more natural than that they should assume, for instance, that the sprinkling of water, the inaugurating ceremony of the purer and better life, should exert a mysterious mechanical influence upon the character ?

If regeneration by baptism, however, with its kindred imaginations, was not true, innocence of intention could not prevent the natural consequences of falsehood. Time went on; knowledge increased; doubt stole in, and with doubt the passionate determination to preserve beliefs at all hazards which had grown too dear to superstition to be parted with. In

the twelfth century the mystery called transubstantiation had come to be regarded with widespread misgiving. To encounter scepticism, there then arose for the first time what have been called pious frauds. It was not perceived that men who lend themselves consciously to lies, with however excellent an intention, will become eventually deliberate rogues. The clergy doubtless believed that in the consecration of the elements an invisible change was really and truly effected. But to produce an effect on the secular mind the invisible had to be made visible. A general practice sprung up to pretend that in the breaking of the wafer real blood had gushed out; real pieces of flesh were found between the fingers. The precious things thus produced were awfully preserved, and with the Pope's blessing were deposited in shrines for the strengthening of faith and the confutation of the presumptuous unbeliever.

When a start has once been made on the road of deception, the after-progress is a rapid one. The desired effect was not produced. Incredulity increased. Imposture ran a race with unbelief in the vain hope of silencing enquiry, and with imposture all genuine love for spiritual or moral truth disappeared.

You all know to what condition the Catholic Church had sunk at the beginning of the sixteenth century. An insolent hierarchy, with an army of priests behind them, dominated every country in Europe. The Church was like a hard nutshell round a shrivelled kernel. The priests in parting with

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their sincerity had lost the control over their own appetites which only sincerity can give. Profligate in their own lives, they extended to the laity the same easy latitude which they asserted for their own conduct. Religious duty no longer consisted in leading a virtuous life, but in purchasing immunity for self-indulgence by one of the thousand remedies which Church officials were ever ready to dispense at an adequate price.

The pleasant arrangement came to an end—a sudden and terrible one. Christianity had not been upon the earth for nothing. The spiritual organisation of the Church was corrupt to the core; but in the general awakening of Europe it was impossible to conceal the contrast between the doctrines taught in the Catholic pulpits and the creed of which they were the counterfeit. Again and again the gathering indignation sputtered out to be savagely repressed. At last it pleased Pope Leo, who wanted money to finish St. Peter's, to send about spiritual hawkers with wares which were called indulgences—notes to be presented at the gates of purgatory as passports to the easiest places there—and then Luther spoke and the whirlwind burst.

I can but glance at the Reformation in Germany. Luther himself was one of the grandest men that ever lived on earth. Never was any one more loyal to the light that was in him, braver, truer, or wider-minded in the noblest sense of the word. The share of the work which fell to him Luther accomplished most perfectly. But he was exceptionally

fortunate in one way, that in Saxony he had his sovereign on his side, and the enemy, however furious, could not reach him with fleshly weapons, and could but grind his teeth and curse. Other nations who had caught Luther's spirit had to win their liberty on harder terms, and the Catholic churchmen were able to add to their other crimes the cruelty of fiends. Princes and politicians, who had State reasons for disliking popular outbursts, sided with the established spiritual authorities. Heresy was assailed with fire and sword, and a spirit harsher than Luther's was needed to steel the converts' hearts for the trials which came upon them. Lutheranism, when Luther himself was gone, and the thing which we in England know as Anglicanism, were inclined to temporising and half-measures. The Lutheran congregations were but half emancipated from superstition, and shrank from pressing the struggle to extremities; and half-measures meant half-heartedness, convictions which were but half convictions, and truth with an alloy of falsehood. Half-measures, however, would not quench the bonfires of Philip of Spain, or raise men in France or Scotland who would meet crest to crest the Princes of the House of Lorraine. The Reformers required a position more sharply defined, and a sterner leader, and that leader they found in John Calvin.

There is no occasion to say much of Calvin's personal history. His name is now associated only with gloom and austerity. Suppose it is true that he rarely laughed. He had none of Luther's genial and sunny

humour. Could they have exchanged conditions, Luther's temper might have been somewhat grimmer, but he would never have been entirely like Calvin. Nevertheless, for hard times hard men are needed, and intellects which can pierce to the roots where truth and lies part company. It fares ill with the soldiers of religion when 'the accursed thing' is in their camp. And this is to be said of Calvin, that so far as the state of knowledge permitted, no eye could have detected more keenly the unsound spots in the received creed of the Church, nor was there reformer in Europe so resolute to excise, tear out, and destroy what was distinctly seen to be false—so resolute to establish what was true in its place, and make truth to the last fibre of it the rule of practical life.

Calvinism as it existed at Geneva, and as it endeavoured to be wherever it took root for a century and a half after him, was not a system of opinion, but an attempt to make the will of God as revealed in the Bible an authoritative guide for social as well as personal direction. Men wonder why the Calvinists, being so doctrinal, yet seemed to dwell so much and so emphatically on the Old Testament. It was because in the Old Testament they found, or thought they found, a divine example of national government, a distinct indication of the laws which men were ordered to follow, with visible and immediate punishments attached to disobedience. At Geneva, as for a time in Scotland, moral sins were treated after the example of the Mosaic law, as crimes to be punished by

the magistrate. 'Elsewhere,' said Knox, speaking of Geneva, 'the Word of God is taught as purely, but never anywhere have I seen God obeyed as faithfully.'[1]

If it was a dream, it was at least a noble one. The Calvinists have been called intolerant. Intolerance of an enemy who is trying to kill you seems to me a pardonable state of mind. It is no easy matter to tolerate lies clearly convicted of being lies under any circumstances; specially it is not easy to tolerate lies which strut about in the name of religion; but there is no reason to suppose that the Calvinists at the beginning would have thought of meddling with the Church if they had been themselves let alone. They would have formed communities apart. Like the Israelites whom they wished to resemble, they would have withdrawn into the wilderness — the Pilgrim Fathers actually did so withdraw into the wilderness of New England—to worship the God of their fathers, and would have left argument and example to work their natural effect. Norman Leslie did not kill Cardinal Beaton down in the castle yonder because he was a Catholic, but because he was a murderer. The Catholics chose to add to their already incredible creed a fresh article, that they were entitled to hang

[1] In burning witches the Calvinists followed their model too exactly; but it is to be remembered that they really believed these poor creatures to have made a compact with Satan. And, as regards morality, it may be doubted whether inviting spirit-rappers to dinner, and allowing them to pretend to consult our dead relations, is very much more innocent. The first method is but excess of indignation with evil; the second is complacent toying with it.

and burn those who differed from them; and in this quarrel the Calvinists, Bible in hand, appealed to the God of battles. They grew harsher, fiercer—if you please—more fanatical. It was extremely natural that they should. They dwelt, as pious men are apt to dwell in suffering and sorrow, on the all-disposing power of Providence. Their burden grew lighter as they considered that God had so determined that they must bear it. But they attracted to their ranks almost every man in Western Europe that 'hated a lie.' They were crushed down, but they rose again. They were splintered and torn, but no power could bend or melt them. They had many faults; let him that is without sin cast a stone at them. They abhorred as no body of men ever more abhorred all conscious mendacity, all impurity, all moral wrong of every kind so far as they could recognise it. Whatever exists at this moment in England and Scotland of conscientious fear of doing evil is the remnant of the convictions which were branded by the Calvinists into the people's hearts. Though they failed to destroy Romanism, though it survives and may survive long as an opinion, they drew its fangs; they forced it to abandon that detestable principle, that it was entitled to murder those who dissented from it. Nay, it may be said that by having shamed Romanism out of its practical corruption the Calvinists enabled it to revive.

Why, it is asked, were they so dogmatic? Why could they not be contented to teach men reasonably and quietly that to be wicked was to be miserable,

that in the indulgence of immoderate passions they would find less happiness than in adhering to the rules of justice, or yielding to the impulses of more generous emotions? And, for the rest, why could they not let fools be fools, and leave opinion free about matters of which neither they nor others could know anything certain at all?

I reply that it is not true that goodness is synonymous with happiness. The most perfect being who ever trod the soil of this planet was called the Man of Sorrows. If happiness means absence of care and inexperience of painful emotion, the best securities for it are a hard heart and a good digestion. If morality has no better foundation than a tendency to promote happiness, its sanction is but a feeble uncertainty. If it be recognised as part of the constitution of the world, it carries with it its right to command; and those who see clearly what it is, will insist on submission to it, and derive authority from the distinctness of their recognition, to enforce submission where their power extends. Philosophy goes no further than probabilities, and in every assertion keeps a doubt in reserve. Compare the remonstrance of the casual passer-by if a mob of ruffians are misbehaving themselves in the street with the downright energy of the policeman who strikes in fearlessly, one against a dozen, as a minister of the law. There is the same difference through life between the man who has a sure conviction and him whose thoughts never rise beyond a 'perhaps.'

Any fanatic may say as much, it is again answered,

for the wildest madness. But the elementary principles of morality are not forms of madness. No one pretends that it is uncertain whether truth is better than falsehood, or justice than injustice. Speculation can eat away the sanction, superstition can erect rival duties, but neither one nor the other pretends to touch the fact that these principles exist, and the very essence and life of all great religious movements is the recognition of them as of authority and as part of the eternal framework of things.

There is, however, it must be allowed, something in what these objectors say. The power of Calvinism has waned. The discipline which it once aspired to maintain has fallen slack. Desire for ease and self-indulgence drag for ever in quiet times at the heel of noble aspirations, while the shadow struggles to remain and preserve its outline when the substance is passing away. The argumentative and logical side of Calvin's mind has created once more a fatal opportunity for a separation between opinion and morality. We have learnt, as we say, to make the best of both worlds; to take political economy for the rule of our conduct, and to relegate religion into the profession of orthodox doctrines. Systems have been invented to explain the inexplicable. Metaphors have been translated into formulas, and paradoxes intelligible to emotion have been thrust upon the acceptance of the reason; while duty, the loftiest of all sensations which we are permitted to experience, has been resolved into the acceptance of a scheme of salvation for the individual human soul. Was it not written long ago,

'He that will save his soul shall lose it'? If we think of religion only as a means of escaping what we call the wrath to come, we shall not escape it; we are already under it; we are under the burden of death, for we care only for ourselves.

This was not the religion of your fathers; this was not the Calvinism which overthrew spiritual wickedness, and hurled kings from their thrones, and purged England and Scotland, for a time at least, of lies and charlatanry. Calvinism was the spirit which rises in revolt against untruth; the spirit which, as I have shown you, has appeared, and re-appeared, and in due time will appear again, unless God be a delusion and man be as the beasts that perish. For it is but the inflashing upon the conscience of the nature and origin of the laws by which mankind are governed—laws which exist, whether we acknowledge them or whether we deny them, and will have their way, to our weal or woe, according to the attitude in which we please to place ourselves towards them—inherent, like the laws of gravity, in the nature of things, not made by us, not to be altered by us, but to be discerned and obeyed by us at our everlasting peril.

Nay, rather the law of gravity is but a property of material things, and matter and all that belongs to it may one day fade away like a cloud and vanish. The moral law is inherent in eternity. 'Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My word shall not pass away.' The law is the expression of the will of the Spirit of the Universe. The spirit in

man which corresponds to and perceives the Eternal Spirit is part of its essence, and immortal as it is immortal. The Calvinists called the eye within us the Inspiration of the Almighty. Aristotle could see that it was not of earth, or any creature of space and time:

> ὁ γὰρ νοῦς (he says) οὐσία τις οὖσα ἔοικεν ἐγγίγνεσθαι καὶ οὐ φθείρεσθαι.

What the thing is which we call ourselves we know not. It may be true—I for one care not if it be—that the descent of our mortal bodies may be traced through an ascending series to some glutinous jelly formed on the rocks of the primeval ocean. It is nothing to me how the Maker of me has been pleased to construct the organised substance which I call my body. It is *mine*, but it is not *me*. The νοῦς, the intellectual spirit, being an οὐσία—an essence—we believe to be an imperishable something which has been engendered in us from another source. As Wordsworth says:

> Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting;
> The soul that rises in us, our life's star,
> Hath elsewhere had its setting,
> And cometh from afar:
> Not in entire forgetfulness,
> Not in utter nakedness,
> But trailing clouds of glory do we come,
> From heaven, which is our home.

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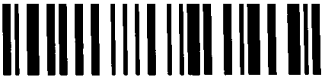
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